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SUBJECT: RUSSIA URGES ROBUST OSCE OBSERVATION OF OCTOBER
ELECTIONS

11. (SBU) Summary: An ODIHR election assessment team visited Latvia August 3-4 to assess the overall state of Latvia's election system prior to October parliamentary elections in order to make recommendations on an OSCE election observation mission. As part of this assessment, the team met with representatives from embassies of OSCE member states. Russian Ambassador Kalyuzhny dominated the one-hour discussion, cataloguing myriad complaints against the election system in Latvia that he charged disproportionately harmed Latvia's ethnic Russian population. Others present at the discussion seemed to take Kalyuzhny's assertions with a healthy degree of skepticism, and OSCE reps suggested to us they will recommend a scaled down mission. We expect Russia will continue to argue this case all the way through to election day. End Summary.

12. (U) On August 3-4, a three person ODIHR needs assessment team visited Latvia to assess the overall election framework in Latvia. The team's findings will influence what kind of observer mission OSCE/ODIHR deploys to Latvia for parliamentary elections October 7. As part of its assessment work, the ODIHR team convened a meeting of representatives from embassies of OSCE member states posted to Latvia to gather their input to the mission report.

13. (SBU) When the ODIHR team members opened the floor for remarks, Russian Ambassador Viktor Kalyuzhny immediately took the floor. He spent the next twenty minutes detailing a litany of complaints regarding the state of elections in Latvia. He first urged the ODIHR team to decide on a full scale observer mission, regardless of the results of the assessment trip. He lamented that there have been few changes to the Latvian electoral system since the last parliamentary elections in 2002 and that the system is unfair to the ethnic Russian population. He asserted that, if the OSCE is to provide full monitoring missions for elections in some post-Soviet states, it must do so in all post-Soviet States--including the Baltics.

14. (SBU) The assertive nature of Ambassador Kalyuzhny's remarks created a stilted atmosphere at the meeting, and few representatives present seemed willing to offer comments. In response to a question from the ODIHR team, the Dutch Ambassador observed that the Latvian Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB--created in 2003), while still experiencing growing pains, has made a good start at addressing corruption issues in Latvia. The Russian Ambassador immediately rejoined that, in fact, the KNAB is simply "a lot of noise, but no results." The entire discussion lasted a little over one hour, with the majority dominated by Kalyuzhny.

15. Following the meeting, one member of the ODIHR assessment team mentioned casually to PolEconOff that, Russian assertions notwithstanding, the team's ultimate recommendation would likely be for a scaled-down observer mission for the upcoming October elections. The team's report is due to be released in late August or early September.

16. (SBU) Comment: The Russian Ambassador delivered his remarks from

carefully prepared talking points fully in line with his normal litany of complaints against the GOL. From the facial expressions of other participants, as well as comments after the event, it appeared that Ambassador Kalyuzhny's statements were taken with a healthy dose of skepticism. Nevertheless, we expect that Russia will, for a variety of reasons, continue to assert in both the OSCE and Council of Europe that Latvia's elections will fall short of basic standards. We have seen nothing to lead us to a similar conclusion. End Comment.

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